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ABSTRACT

In Greece, "small schools" usually means those with less than 50, and perhaps, as few as 3 children. The isolation and inaccessibility of many regions, due to Greece's many mountain ranges and islands, have resulted in many small "schools of necessity." Even with the demographic shift to urban regions since World War II, 24 percent of schools were still small in 1994. Since 1950, there has been a shift of population as rural people moved to urban areas seeking a better income and lifestyle. With this decrease in rural population, the state consolidated many one-teacher schools with neighboring schools in spite of opposition from rural inhabitants. The state's educational policy does not favor small schools, due in part to their high operating costs. Teachers appointed to small schools often have no previous teaching experience, and school operating funds are inadequate. There is emerging evidence that small schools should be preserved for a variety of social, educational, and economic reasons, and recent programs using multimedia technology, computers, and distance learning have been successful in improving the viability of small schools. The small school is not threatened so much by urbanization and rural depopulation as it is by the indifference of those in charge and their inability to redefine the role of small schools in tomorrow's society. The difficulties presented by the operation of small schools can be dealt with if there is political will and attention is given to the experiences of other countries facing this problem. (TD)

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The small rural schools in Greece: A new role in a changing society

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The small rural schools in Greece:A new role in a changing society.

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1. Introduction

The terms "small schools" and "schools in rural areas" are clearly used in every country to describe schools with a small number of pupils which are located in the countryside. However, the exact number of pupils that characterizes a school as small varies from country to country. Moreover, the characteristics of rural areas also vary from country to country. These differences in the content of the two terms coupled with differences in the educational systems and educational policies of each country probably mean that there are different problems to be faced by small schools as regards their organisation and operation. The fact remains, however, that compulsory education, despite the differences from country to country, has certain common characteristics and a large number of common problems. This allows us to assume that small schools will also have similar problems varying perhaps in extent, size and seriousness. Locating these problems, attempting to draw up common programmes and to apply common strategies to deal with them are both a challenge and an invitation for cooperation between members of the educational community of all countries.

2. Small schools in Greece

2.1 Organisation and operation

In Greece, primary schools with a small teaching staff (oligothesia) are those where the school population does not exceed 150 pupils. They are schools, in other words, which employ up to 5 teachers (i.e., there is not one teacher for each grade level) and in which there are mixed classes (classes with children of different ages who are co-taught part of the school curriculum). Schools with less than 90 pupils are considered small - usually, however, when we speak of small schools we mean those with less than 50 pupils, and, quite often, less than 25 children. The number of pupils determines the number of teachers who work at the school. Small schools with 10 to 25 children have only one teacher, those with 26 to 50 children have two teachers, and those with 51 to 90 have three teachers. The number of pupils which corresponds to each teaching position may be reduced by a joint decision made by the Ministry of National Education and Religion and the Ministry of Finance. Furthermore, in cases where it is made necessary by specific local circumstances, it is possible to set up one class primary schools, irrespective of the number of pupils who are to be taught. Thus, in remote mountainous regions, for example, there are schools which operate with 6 pupils, and even with just 3 children.

In small schools in general there are fewer pupils per teacher than would usually be the case in city schools that are fully-staffed (polythesia). Primary schools with one, two or three teachers (monothesia, dithesia and trithesia respectively) can merge, by decision of the above-mentioned Ministries, if it is judged expedient for organisational and operational reasons, into schools with four teachers or even schools with a large academic staff, which operate at one of the locations of the schools which merge. Furthermore, more than one regional schools, with less than 15 children each, can merge into one central primary school. In this case, the pupils are bused from their area to the location where classes take place[1]. The amalgamation of schools usually happens in flat rural or urban areas where the transportation of children from one village to another or one school to another is relatively easy[2]. Small schools use the same teaching manuals brought out by the Organisation of Publication of Educational Books on behalf of the Ministry of Education and implement the same school curriculum[3] in effect in every school in the country, adjusted only to the teaching hours of different cognitive subjects per class and, of course, the teaching methods adopted in the classroom. The manner of class organisation and the teaching approaches used in these schools are chosen by the teacher him or

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[1] In general, in case the number of pupils in a school does not justify the presence of one teacher per class the two classes become one and are co-taught. The first to merge are the third and fourth classes. Classes five and six follow. Amalgamation is usually avoided in classes A and B where children are still young and need the teacher's undivided attention for longer time. What't more language and mathematics are seperately taught in these classes. In one-place schools, the teacher divides his/hertime into three cycles of co-taught subjects: lower--classes A and B--where language and mathematics are taught seperately for each class, intermediate--C and D classes and upper-- E and F classes. In the last two cycles only mathematics are taught seperately for each class. The same applies in the case of two-place schools, only here, there are two cycles, the age combination of which varies. Thus the two teachers of the school may decide to divide the children so that the intermediate cycle "breaks", i.e., (A+B)+C and D+(E+F) or so that the lower cycle breaks, i.e., A+(C+D) and B+(E+F). The latter allocation of classes seems more logical and teachers seem to favour it, as the two most basic lessons are not co-taught in the first lower classes. Moreover, this second way of allocation of classes has the advantage of smaller age difference between children in the same class. These two ways of allocation of children-classes are the most common but not the only ones, since very often the division in two cycles of attendance is dictated by the number of students in each class.

[2] Principal of the one-place school is the teacher of the school and in the case of two- and three-place schools the higher in rank teacher becomes the principal.

[3] The Greek educational system is highly centralised, i.e., all decisions are taken by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry takes for granted that all school age children start their school life with the same experiences and knowledge and designates a uniform curriculum with common aims, objectives, teaching approaches and assessment tools. It thus anticipates that all children of the same age, regardless of their natural, social and cultural background, will acquire the same skills and conceptual structures and strategies.

herself so as to respond to the various needs and demands of the school population.

Rural schools which have one or two teachers arrange the daily programme of lessons into three two-hour sessions, but where there is only one teacher, he or she has 6 classes, while where there are two teachers, each one has 3 classes. The fact that in small schools (up to 3 teachers) one, two or three teachers cater to the needs of all classes has as a result shorter lessons (of 30 minutes), more hours of teaching (5 extra hours per week), and co-teaching of some classes (depending on the number of teachers, all classes, 3 or 2 classes, are taught together.[4].

In small schools (from now on to be called "one class" schools, and, referring mainly to schools with one teacher and less often, with two or three teachers) the first and second teaching hours run with no break and last 100 minutes. After a 20 minute break, the second two-lesson session follows and lasts 90 minutes, and the third lasting 80 minutes concludes the daily programme.[5]

As an example, the weekly schedule of a one class school is as follows:

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[4] In the case of joint courses, such as History, Environmental Studies, Geography, the syllabus of one class is taught to both classes in one school year and the syllabus of the next class is again taught to both classes the next year.

[5] The daily schedule of the six-place school runs as follows concerning teaching hours and breaks: 50'-10', 45'-15', 45'-10', 45'-10', and 40'-end of daily programme. While the teaching sessions are 225' and breaks 45' per day, the corresponding hours in small rural schools is 270' and 40', children that is, attend one extra hour a day in relation to their peers in regular schools.

Subjects	Weekly Teaching Hours			
	A +	B	C+D	E+F
Religion			1/2	2/2
Greek	6/2	6/2	10/2	8/2
Mathematics	2/2	2/2	4/2	4/2
History			1/2	1/2
Environmental Studies	2/2		3/2	
Geography				1/2
Physics				2/2
Social and Political Education				1/2
Art		silent work 1/2		
Physical - Education			2/2	
Total number of hours	30 (25 equivalent in regular schools)			

2.2 The evolution of small rural schools

Small rural schools and in particular one class schools were referred to in the past as village schools and schools of necessity. And these really were schools of necessity for the rural mainland and the islands. Small schools, most one class and a few two class, were the model for primary schools which prevailed in the country from 1834, when the education of children was made compulsory for 7 years in all, without, however, specifying the classes. The foundation of one class schools was the result of necessity rather than choice which could be made by the country at that time.

The geographical map of the country develops in many endless mountain ranges between which there are small strecthes of land with a few plains found mostly along the coastline. The Greek islands, small and larger islands, are scattered at shorter or longer distances from the mainland. The population of many villages on the mainland and islands was, until relatively a few years ago, to a serious extent cut off from the rest of the country' s population. The large distances from the nearest urban centre, the inaccessibility of the regions, and the rudimentary means of transport at their disposal drove the inhabitants into forced isolation and total lack of communication with the urban mainland. School

and church together comprised the two sources of culture, of social gathering and contact among the inhabitants themselves and with the world beyond the narrow confines of their community. The state, obliged by the Constitution which stipulated primary education[6] was compulsory for all Greek citizens, founded schools in even the smallest, most remote villages. Unable to afford the financial burden of employing two teachers at the same school, however, the State resorted mainly to the solution of hiring only one teacher. The one class school as a solution to the problem of compulsory education led inevitably to the choice of a specific teaching method, mutual-teaching, again as a solution to the problem of having one teacher and many children. The mutual teaching[7] method was abolished in 1880 which marked the founding of mostly two class schools and fully-staffed schools. The number of schools with a small academic staff and especially those with one teacher increasingly declined a few years after the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, there is still a significant number of small rural schools to this day. More specifically: according to data supplied by the Ministry of Education and Religion, in 1953-54, from a total of 8947 schools, 7417 were small schools, and of these 4750 were one class schools. In 1993-94, from a total of 7368 schools, 4460 are small schools, and of these, only 1786 were one class schools. Within forty years, in other words, the percentage of one class schools fell from 53% to 24%.

2.3 The decline of one class schools

Social, economic and educational factors resulted in the decline of one class schools.

a. Social factors

During the first half of our century, the villages of mountainous and insular Greece, despite their isolation, were relatively crowded, active communities. The operation of the school and the continuous and active presence of the teacher in his place of work enhanced the cultural, emotional and psychological potential of the small community. The school organised cultural events, it created the opportunities and promoted relationships that placed the teacher in the middle of

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[6] A decree voted in 1964 designated that secondary education be divided in two three-year cycles. The first, Junior High School, is compulsory and the second, Senior High School is optional.Thus compulsory education increased from 6 to 9 years. These measures were abolished by the Junta three years afterwards, in 1967, and they were re-established by law in 1976, two years after the fall of the Junta.

[7] In mutual teaching, the teacher selected a few, the best students, to act as his/her aides. These aides acted as tutors for their younger or weaker schoolmates.

the community as an active, dominant figure. The school guaranteed that the small children and young adolescents of the village shared the same quality of education with children in the rest of the country. The teacher acted as a source of information, he/she was the intermediary between the village and the big city, had access to knowledge. He/she could listen to and learn about the problems and the aspirations of the villagers concerning themselves and their children. The parents saw the school as the vehicle to their children's social, educational and economic advancement. For adult inhabitants, the school operated as an institution of psychological support and continuing education and was identified with learning and social mobility. The state, responding to its obligations, the demands of the era, and the needs of the inhabitants of remote areas founded and supported small schools everywhere, despite the unprofitable nature of their upkeep.

Beginning in the 1950' s, there started a great flow of depopulation and urbanism. The social, economic and technological changes were so overwhelming that the state failed to keep up with them and respond adequately so as to keep the population of these areas in their place of birth. These changes have had a powerful impact on the Greek society and have determined the life and development of small rural communities. Electronic means of communication (TV, radio, telephone, etc) and also the improvement of public transport have opened new channels of global communication introducing new life styles and creating new aspirations. Nevertheless, the essential prerequisites for the urbanisation of small villages in the countryside have not been created. Cities have expanded, offering jobs and prospects of escape from poverty promising better standards of living. Year by year, remote, rural villages saw the number of internal or external emigrants grow and the number of permanent residents decrease. The emigration both abroad and to the cities has been dictated mainly by economic factors. Young parents have been obliged, at first seasonally but later on a permanent basis, to move to the nearest urban centre in order to secure income and better educational opportunities for their children. Today, most mountainous and insular villages are inhabited by the old. Young people have abandoned the village. It was not easy for the state to guarantee the cultural, social and economic conditions for them, so they were forced to leave their birthplace, eager as they were to share the opportunities in life the big city had to offer[8]. Small children increasingly become a rarer sight and in many villages they have disappeared. One class schools are losing their "clientele". In many mountainous regions they still operate, with very few

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[8] Those educationally deprived have, according to Eliou (1984) social identity. "Low income, rural occupation, the long distance from big urban centres, especially the Capital, limited participation in cultural events, on the one hand, and educational opportunities, on the other ... are closely related" (p. 100). Rural area inhabitants present the characteristics of this social identity.

children, but in others they are closing down. In the plain regions which have been urbanised, schools have either been maintained, or merged with schools of neighbouring villages in order to create one regular fully-staffed school.

b. Economic factors

The maintenance and operational costs of numerous small schools have always been particularly high. Today that educational demands have risen considerably, the maintainance of small schools has become a burden for the state. In addition to the cost of maintaining school buildings, heating, teaching aids and equipment, the state has to provide foreign language and physical education experts. An enormous amount of money is required to guarantee that children in small villages have equal educational opportunities. For this reason, in cases where the number of inhabitants -and consequently the number of pupils- in a village continues to decline, the state often decides to close down schools with one teacher and bus its few pupils to a school in a neighbouring village which has more children.

c. Educational factors

The educational policy implemented by the state since 1970 does not favour the operation of small rural schools; on the contrary, it promotes the accumulation of pupils in large educational centres[9]. The inhabitants of small rural areas, however, as well as those in larger villages in plains, have opposed the closing down of the schools and have resisted the idea of busing their children to villages nearby. In their small communities, parents are used to having everyday contact with their children's school. Moreover, the very existence of the school in their own village is a question of pride and prestige and its closure makes them antagonistic to the other village' s inhabitants, as if they have fought a battle and lost.

Apart from people's wish to maintain the schools there is evidence of research into the field, in Greece (Zymaris, 1983) but mainly abroad (Burstall, 1974, Forsythe, 1983, Galton, 1990, 1993, and others) which suggests that the

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[9] In Greece, as in other European countries and in the USA, there is a wide range of views regarding one class schools. There are those who claim that it has more advantages than disadvantages and those who consider that the quality of education provided is inferior to that of regular schools and so they support their abolishment and the subsequent establishment of six class schools. This view is also shared by school advisors, as their recent report to the Ministry of Education indicates.

influence of small schools on children has more advantages than disadvantages. Nevertheless, both policy makers and a large number of educators seem reluctant to support the idea of one class school and thus make efforts to redefine its role and innovate its function.

The following are some moves taken by the government, which are indicative of its attitudes and intentions of the future of one class schools:

-The teachers usually appointed to these schools are newly assigned teachers with no previous teaching experience. We must admit, however, that this policy adopted by the state is a choice dictated by necessity, since experienced educators are reluctant to work in these schools. Most of the teachers who work for one class schools choose to apply for another less isolated or demanding post a year after their initial appointment. The nine months the teacher spends in his or her place of work, even if he or she actually lives in the village are hardly enough for the development of mutual trust and understanding between the teacher and the local community. There is not enough time for the development of appropriate teaching curricula, for discussing and finding solutions for educational or even social problems of the small community.

-Securing experienced personnel for a one class school and supporting it financially will not keep the small village community alive, will not quench the desire of young people to abandon the village and pursue their dreams and aspirations in the big city. Services and incentives should be devised to support not only teachers but also other professionals and employees in their decision to live and to work in these small distant places. Today, teachers who are appointed to work in one class schools feel anxious and apprehensive, because they lack the appropriate training to deal with the teaching and administrative work assigned to them by the state. At the same time, they feel trapped in the small community as they have no access to educational seminars and events that would enrich their work and promote their professional growth. The anxiety, disillusionment and total lack of stimulation forces them to leave. It is hard to live in a deprived environment, when you have savoured the amenities and opportunities of the big city and you are given the chance to change place of work.

-The amount of money allocated by the state for the operational needs of small rural schools is barely enough to cover the heating cost during the winter months. As a result, the schools necessarily remain without teaching aids, without apparatus and without the resources which would make teaching more interesting and learning more effective. The state provides rural schools in exactly the same way it does city schools, without securing at the same time

similar living conditions-equivalent standards of living-to the inhabitants of rural areas.

-In recent years, there has been an attempt to support one class schools in several rural areas, for example, Thrace -a large area in northern Greece- and the Aegean islands, with new multimedia technology, which opens up new prospects for their future. One example of a successful application of electronic means of communication in a one class school is that of the Aegean island Karpathos. In 1992, a team of scientists who work at the Institute of Word Processing created the first CD-Rom to be used for the teaching of the Greek language. In 1993 the programme called "Logomathia" (or "Wordlearning") was put into practice experimentally for the teaching of language in a school with eleven children and a priest-teacher.[10] According to the teacher, the use of the computer filled the children with enthusiasm and acted as an incentive to learn. In addition, the computer functioned as a second (electronic) teacher, making the educational process much easier. While the teacher works with a group of children on a subject, the rest of the class can work with the computer on another subject or on the same one but at a different level. In other words, the computer replaced the "silent work" of the traditional one class school, whereby teachers had to make pupils of one grade work silently so that they could work with other pupils of different grades. The success of the experiment put the basis for the more widespread use of the programme in schools with one teacher throughout Greece.

3. Conclusions

The great social and economic changes of the second half of our century have affected rural economy, have changed the basic traditional social fabric and created social, economic and educational needs. Small schools operating in the traditional way cannot cater to these new needs and demands. Therefore, there is a pressing issue over the future of small schools: Will the state reconsider its policy and change its attitude towards them? Will these schools continue to diminish? Will they be kept as they are? Will they be reformed?

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[10] The particular teacher has been working in the school since 1988, when he decided to leave the city where he had been living and move to his parents homeland, in an effort to offer his services to the small community while he was still young. In 1990, after raising the money from the islanders, he bought and set up the first computer in the school. The computer was used as a word processor for the children's school assignments. In the summer of 1993, the Institute of Word Processing, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education set up a PC of multimedia capacity and trained the teacher to use the Logomathia programme. The islanders raised the money to buy four more personal computers of multimedia capacity and a rich electronic library with Greek and foreign programmes for the instruction of Geography, History, etc. Today there are four more computers in schools of the island.

What will be the new format of their operation? In case the state decides to maintain them, what new organisational structures can be developed to repplace the ones in effect, so that the standard of education provided at these schools is not inferior to that found in large schools in the cities?

Recent research data support their maintainance and question the alleged negative points indicated by experts in the past. In our country small rural schools seem viable due to the country's population allocation. Small rural schools must be preserved for many reasons - social, educational and economic - in small communities which still have not died out. The role of the small rural school in this changing society is an important one. It has always been but it runs the risk of being rendered obsolete due to its inflexibility to change its organisation and philosophy. The small school is not threatened so much by the urbanisation of most parts of the countryside and the depopulation of many isolated villages, as it is by the indifference of those in charge and their inability to locate and redefine the new role which the small school is called on to play in the society of tomorrow.

The example of the school in Karpathos could help pave the way towards reforming educational policy in the country. The institution of distance learning which will be implemented in the next academic year in our country opens up new possibilities of communication, education and continuing education. Electronic means of communications are there to be exploited.

Beyond electronic communication though, there is urgent need for human contact of those involved in the educational process in other small schools in the same area and at schools in the nearest urban centres. Communication between different schools, between schools and educational centres and between teachers of small schools and continuing education centres are open possibilities that could be considered.

The operation of one class schools certainly presents difficulties and involves a host of problems. The difficulties can be dealt with and the problems solved if there is the political will and the necessary know-how and if the experience of other countries in this field of education is taken into account. To this end, cooperation between countries who face the same problem is especially useful.

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